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RECENT WORKS ON MAIMONIDES

La Métaphysique de Maïmonide. Par LOUIS-GERMAIN LÉVY.

Dijon: BARBIER MARILIER, 1905. pp. 149.

Maïmonide. Par LOUIS-GERMAIN LÉVY. (*Collection des Grands Philosophes.*) Paris: FÉLIX ALCAN, 1911. pp. 284.

Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides). Sein Leben und seine Werke.

Von Dr. J. MÜNZ. Frankfurt am Main: KAUFFMANN, 1912.

pp. 335.

The Eight Chapters of Maimonides on Ethics (Shemonah Perakim).

A Psychological and Ethical Treatise. Edited, annotated, and translated with an introduction by JOSEPH I. GORFINKLE, Ph.D. (*Columbia University Oriental Studies*, vol. VII.)

New York: COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1912. pp. xii +

104 + 55.

We have before us several books on Maimonides in French, German, and English which complement each other. They have all been written entirely or in great part during the last two or three years—a good sign of continued interest in the writings of our great thinkers of the Middle Ages.

I arranged them above in chronological order, but logically Münz's work comes first, containing as it does a general sketch of Maimonides's life, works, and many-sided activity. It is a popular volume and decidedly readable and up to date. It is divided into seven chapters treating of Maimonides's youth and early writings; of his commentary on the Mishnah; of his activity as a Rabbinical authority; of his great Rabbinic code, the *Yad ha-ḥazakah*; of his philosophic masterpiece, the *Guide of the Perplexed*; of his activity as physician and medical writer; and of his character, family life, and death. The book is

naturally not exhaustive, nor does it pretend to originality. It draws considerably on the material contained in the first volume on Moses ben Maimon published in 1908 by the Berlin *Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, a very important volume, by the way, on the various aspects of Maimonides's work. The volume of Münz is valuable as a popular sketch in non-technical phraseology for the general reader who may not be attracted by the more formidable aspect of the other volume just referred to.

Having acquired a general idea of Maimonides as a great Jew, a great authority in Rabbinic lore, a great physician both in theory and in practice, and a great thinker—the greatest that mediaeval Jewry has produced, the reader is prepared to study more carefully one particular aspect of Maimonides's varied activity, and the most striking is undoubtedly his work as a philosopher and theologian. Louis-Germain Lévy, the Rabbi of the 'Union Libérale Israélite', shows in the two works at the head of this article that he is quite competent to treat of this aspect of Maimonides's work. The first treatise, written in 1905 on the Metaphysics of Maimonides, contains nothing that is not found in his later and more complete work published in 1911 as one of the volumes in the series of 'Great Philosophers'. On the other hand, the later work reproduces bodily the earlier work with very slight changes in phraseology, but it enlarges it considerably, especially in the chapter on the influence of Maimonides, which, though brief, is excellent and complete in outline.¹ The chapters on theoretical and practical ethics are new in the larger work. Lévy's work on Maimonides is at the present time the best monograph we have on the philosophy of Maimonides. Naturally here also there was not much room for originality, as the ideas of Maimonides are pretty well known

¹ Recently Prof. Crawford, of the University of Pennsylvania, discovered Maimonidean influence in a Spanish work of the fifteenth century. See 'The Visión Dilectable of Alfonso de la Torre and Maimonides's Guide of the Perplexed' in the *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, XXVIII, 2, pp. 188-212.

and have been treated at length in various special monographs. Thus Scheyer wrote on Maimonides's psychology, Rosin treated of Maimonides's ethics, and Kaufmann discussed Maimonides's doctrine of divine attributes. Joel wrote a sketch of Maimonides's system as a whole. What originality the volume possesses is to be found in the arrangement of the material, which is divided into twelve chapters. In this he differs from Guttman, whose excellent monographs on Saadia, Gabirol, and Abraham Ibn Daud follow closely the exposition of the authors treated.

To come to details, one feature to be noted in all recent works on Jewish philosophy is the emphasis put upon the influence of Philo on mediaeval Jewish thought. This used to be denied formerly, since there was no evidence of a direct acquaintance with the writings of Philo on the part of the Jewish mediaeval writers. To be sure, no one denied that indirect influence there was, through Neo-Platonism as embodied in the so-called 'Theology of Aristotle', and through the Church Fathers who exerted some influence on the early Arabic speculation. But since the article of Poznański in the *Revue des Études Juives*, showing that some of the Karaites apparently had some knowledge of Philo, all writers give prominence to this matter. There is danger, it seems to the present writer, of exaggeration in this respect. The allusions to Philo in the fragments quoted by Poznański are not very definite, and as long as one knows precisely what the evidence is there is no danger, but as statements are passed on from one book to another, they are likely to become more positive than the state of the evidence warrants.

It is surprising to find that Levy (p. 6) attributes the anonymous work on the *Reflections of the Soul* to Bahya. It was recently edited by Goldziher, and the general opinion seems to be that it is not Bahya's.

Levy says in a note (p. 51, note 3) that the doctrine of attributes originated with the Neo-Platonists. The present writer has a suspicion, though it needs verification, that the origin of the doctrine of attributes is to be sought in Christianity. To be sure, Neo-Platonism played a great rôle in the elaboration of the

Christian Trinity, and we may say that the doctrine of attributes was the result of the mutual interaction of Christianity and Neo-Platonism. It is of interest to compare Saadia's three attributes, Life, Power, and Wisdom, with those given by Elias of Nisibis, a Syrian Christian, viz. Essence, Wisdom, and Life.²

Lévy's defence of Maimonides against the charge of agnosticism (pp. 141, 222 ff.) is interesting and in the main correct. Maimonides's negative theology does involve also a positive theology, as it does too with Philo. And yet when we come to fix this positive theology we find that while perfection and active thought are the terms used, they must not be given the ordinary meanings assigned to these words, and we are again in the dark.

Equally interesting and meritorious is Lévy's discussion (pp. 189-90) showing that with Maimonides Knowledge of God and Love of God are identical, and hence he is not a dry rationalist and intellectualist merely.

The dissertation of Gorfinkle takes us still closer to Maimonides himself by introducing us to a text, the so-called 'Eight Chapters', serving as an introduction to Maimonides's commentary on Aboth, and presenting a sketch of an ethical doctrine. Unlike the books just discussed, Gorfinkle's work is not concerned so much with Maimonides's ideas as with the text of a particular treatise. The eight chapters were written by Maimonides in Arabic. They were translated into Hebrew by Samuel Ibn Tibbon. The Hebrew text has been reprinted a great many times, and the majority of editions contain a great many errors, which in some cases make the meaning hard to decipher. Gorfinkle did a meritorious service in his endeavour to establish the Hebrew text of Samuel Ibn Tibbon by using a number of early prints and MSS. Thus he used a MS. in the British Museum dated 1273, a MS. Maḥzor of the fourteenth or fifteenth century, a Soncino edition of about 1484-5, and a Mishna text with Maimonides's commentary dated Naples, 1492.

² See Graf, *Die Philosophie und Gotteslehre des Jahya Ibn 'Adi*, Münster, 1810, p. 52; also p. 32, note.

The text is provided also with an English translation, which, though not literal, is in the main precise and adequate. A very good introduction discussing Maimonides's writings in general and his ethical writings in particular, the contents of the 'Eight Chapters', Samuel Ibn Tibbon as a translator, a list of MSS., editions, translations, and commentaries of the 'Eight Chapters', adds completeness to this meritorious and useful production.

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